



***Idiom***, a 43-foot topsail schooner, departs Palmyra after her crew was threatened at gunpoint and ordered off the island by Roger Lextrait.





# ISLAND ~~PARADISE~~

What's really happening on the beach of the idyllic Pacific atoll called Palmyra? For some it has been a cruiser's paradise. But not everyone who has made it past the treacherous reef to the pristine white sands has been welcomed. The field notes from this far outpost tell two dramatically different stories.



# ISLAND PARADOX



# Part 1: Palmyra, our own private paradise, in which we revel in the delights of the “most beautiful island in the Pacific”

BY MARK SMAALDERS



**A**

WE LEFT HAWAII, bound on an open-ended cruise through the Pacific, we vowed to seek out islands less developed and more off the beaten track than the ones we had called home for eight years. So, despite the lure of French Polynesia, we set our course for peaceful Palmyra, a privately owned, uninhabited atoll lying 960 nautical miles southwest of Honolulu and 352 miles north of the equator.

Palmyra is one of three U.S. possessions within the Line Islands archipelago; the other islands in the chain belong to the nation of Kiribati. We were encouraged to visit Palmyra by its caretaker, veteran French cruiser Roger Lextrait, whom we met in Honolulu during one of his provisioning trips. “I’ve cruised the entire Pacific from Alaska to the Solomon Islands,” he told us. “Palmyra is the most beautiful island you will find.” A visit to Palmyra also would break up the long passage between Hawaii and Samoa, where we planned a brief mail stop.

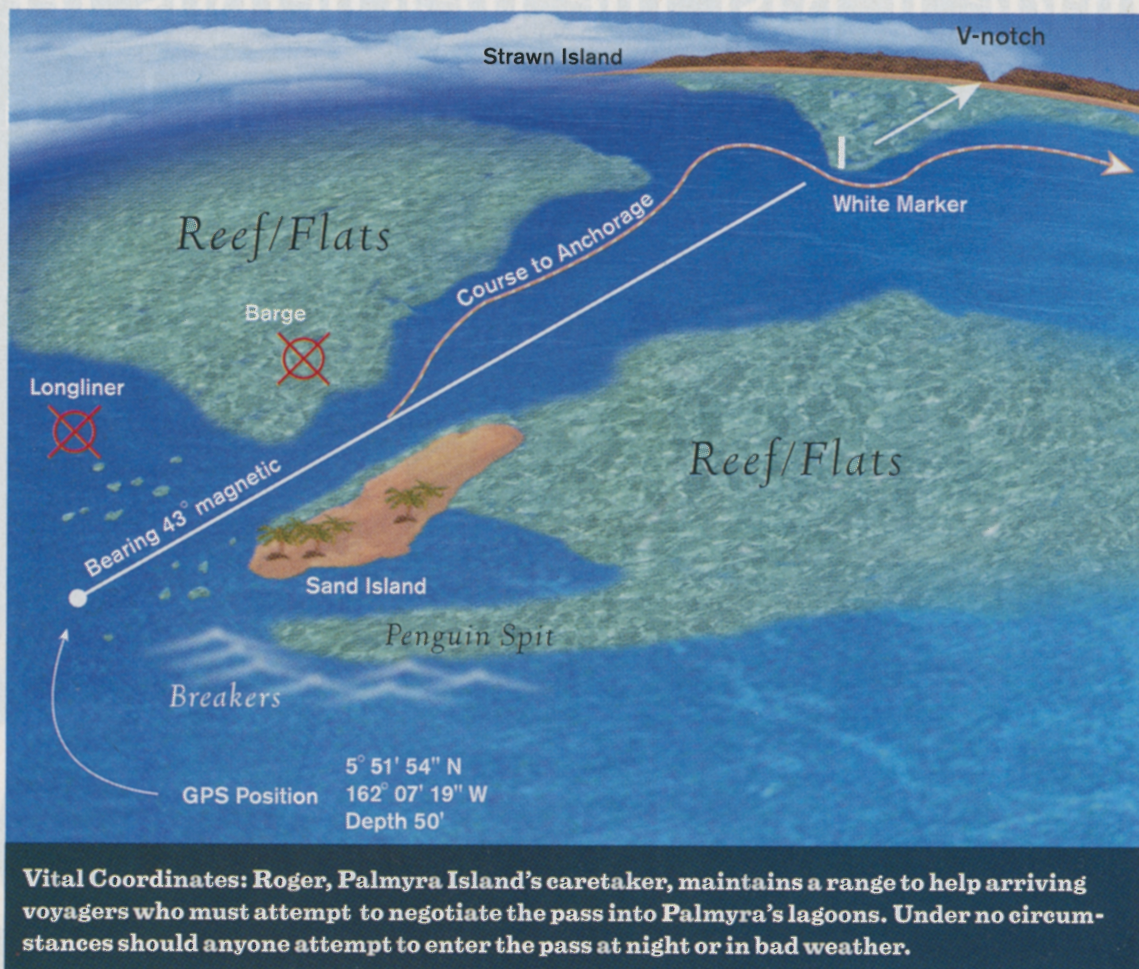
Palmyra lies at the southern edge of the Northeast trade wind belt. The trades at Palmyra shift between northeast and southeast, and the island experiences frequent squalls and calms, both common features of the intertropical convergence zone. Due to the possibility of encountering contrary southeast winds when sailing from Hawaii to Palmyra, it is wise to make some easting, even though Palmyra

lies southwest of Hawaii. Sailing from Honolulu, it is best to set a course of 180 degrees magnetic until clear of the island of Hawaii’s wind shadow, and then come up to a course of 170 degrees. Upon reaching 10 degrees north latitude, a rhumb line course for Palmyra can be sailed. Our passage took eight days, which is fairly typical.

Approach Palmyra from the southeast, as the reef flat to the northwest is very wide and has proven a magnet for boats and ships in years past; their wrecks still litter the reefs and beaches.

Roger estimates that 95 percent of the boats visiting the atoll either scrape, bump, or find themselves hard on the reef when entering. The vast majority get off without major incident, but some have needed extensive repairs before proceeding. While we were on Palmyra, a 37-foot wooden ketch strayed from the channel and onto the reef. It took six of us working with four anchors and hundreds of feet of line a full day to get her off, and another two days were spent applying copper patches to her bottom to protect against worm damage. The mistakes committed by the crew were common: they failed to line up perfectly on the channel’s center line, and they approached when the lighting was poor, which made it difficult to discern the color gradations distinguishing deep water from the reef flat on either side of the channel.

The pass into the lagoon is located on the island’s southwest side and should be approached only during the day and with extreme caution, as it is narrow and unmarked by lights or buoys. In these days of satellite navigation, the simplest way to begin an approach into the lagoon is to enter the following coordinates into your GPS: 5°51'54" N, 162°07'19" W. This position is located in about 50 feet of water,



FRED POISSON



# THE FINE ART OF APPROACHING AND ENTERING ATOLLS

BY EARL HINZ

The islets (or motus) on a coral reef surrounding an atoll's lagoon are far from uniform in size or vegetation and can provide clues to where a pass through the reef is located. Reef growth on the windward side is prolific because ocean currents supply nutrients to the immobile coral polyps. These currents also deposit detritus on the windward reef, allowing vegetation to take root. While we usually think of an atoll's lagoon as being surrounded by islets and reefs like a string of pearls, there are many atolls whose leeward sides are often awash at high tide. Passes exist for a variety of reasons; some atolls have no passes at all. Most "ship" passes (two fathoms or more in depth) are on the leeward side of an atoll, while "canoe" passes (under one fathom in depth) can be found at many other locations. Some canoe passes can be waded across at low tide and can be confused with simple breaks in vegetation on the reef. Such breaks, generally, are barely awash and are at best useful only for tidepool shell collecting.

Make your initial approach to an atoll at the windward end. This affords you the earliest opportunity to see the highest elevations on the atoll, usually the tops of palm trees. The land under the trees may not become visible until you are almost upon it and facing a fatal encounter with the submerged table reef extending offshore. Depth sounders are of little value in anticipating these reefs, as they rise up suddenly from the depths. GPS is also of little value, because its inherent position error, and that of many charts, is too large to allow you safely to navigate a narrow, sometimes winding pass.

Once you are within sight of the atoll, turn parallel to its shoreline in the direction of the pass and search for its open-



Palmyra's lagoons, protected by the encircling reef of the atoll, are a sanctuary for a variety of birds.

ing. Stay in safe water until you fully understand what you are looking at. Irregularities in the islets and the varying degrees of vegetation growth can deceive the eye of an eager sailor.

Also keep in mind that over the years the outflow from the lagoon through the pass may have carried considerable sand and other stony debris out into the approach corridor.

Eyeball navigation from the spreaders is the only safe way to transit a pass. It is preferable, almost mandatory, that you have the sun at your back to enhance your ability to see where the deep water lies. Polarized sunglasses tend to penetrate the surface reflection and improve depth perception. Never attempt to transit a pass at night or during a squall. During prevailing trade wind seasons, the outflow from a lagoon is noticeably stronger than the inflow (currents may run 4 to 6 knots) because seas on the

windward side of the atoll break over the reef and flood the lagoon, which then drains through the pass. After a lengthy period of strong winds and heavy swells, this outflow may overwhelm the lunar tides for several days, counteracting flood currents. Races may also occur at either end of the pass; these can give you a wild ride. Observations of currents in the Tuamotu atolls have produced some general rules of thumb for estimating current direction under normal circumstances (see box).

It is advisable to transit a pass with plenty of boatspeed. Whirlpools and eddies created by the irregular and often curving shape of a pass demand good steering control, which requires adequate speed. Usually there are no coral heads rising to the surface in a pass, but these may be found on the lagoon side, so be prepared to maneuver around them.

Atolls are the most fascinating land masses in the ocean world, but they claim more than their share of boats. Care in approaching, entering, and crossing the lagoons is essential if you hope to enjoy their peace and beauty.

Time	Current in Pass
Moonrise minus 1 hr.	Slack water of short duration with beginning of ebb flow
Moonrise plus 3-4 hr.	Slack water again
Moonrise plus 4 hrs.	Flood begins
Moonsset minus 1 hr.	Ebb flow begins
Moonsset plus 3-4 hrs.	Slack water again
Moon's lower meridan passage minus 1 hr.	Flood begins



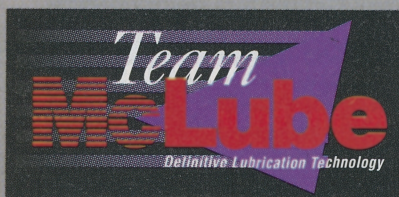
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about a quarter of a mile off the entrance to the pass. It is a safe location from which to take visual bearings that will help you stay in the center of the pass, and also a good location to return to should you lose your bearings and need to line up again. When we arrived at Palmyra, it was only on our third attempt that we felt certain of our position and course and successfully entered the lagoon.

From this "safe" position, a course of 43 degrees magnetic will lead you directly into the pass, but it is important to have visual bearings as well. To assist in lining up an approach, Roger has cut a V-notch in the vegetation on Strawn Island. Using binoculars, it is possible to see a white marker located in the water just south of Strawn, and beyond that, a brown pole located in the center of the V. When the white marker lines up with the center of the V (and thus with the brown pole), you are perfectly aligned with the center of the channel. Careful use of this range marker, combined with a sharp lookout for changes in water color, should get you through the pass with no trouble. If poor visibility or other problems arise, it may be possible to request assistance on VHF Channel 16 from Roger or other cruisers anchored in the lagoon.

As you navigate the pass, be careful not to mistake the prominent wreck of a Korean longliner for the wreck shown on the chart. The latter is a small dredging barge aground on the reef flat on the north side of the pass. The longliner lies one-half mile farther out, also on the north side of the pass, but in 10 to 20 feet of water.

Once through the pass, follow the recommended course shown on the NOAA chart (Number 83157) to the anchorage located left of the abandoned airstrip on Cooper Island. The holding is good with a muddy/sandy bottom, but the lagoon is quite deep in places. Take careful note of the depths in the area where you anchor and, if possible, consult Roger or other cruisers before dropping your anchor.

Palmyra has many rewards for those who run the gauntlet of the pass. It's a great venue for fishing, snorkeling, beachcombing, and exploring. A special treat for new arrivals is the freshwater bath. There are three water catchment systems on the island: one supplies water for laundry, another is reserved for drinking water, and a third, very large tank fills the bathtub. Freshwater is normally available, but check with Roger before using any. In addition to the water available on shore,



**Roger is part comedian, part gourmet chef, all enigma. Most visitors to Palmyra enjoy his hospitality, but others feel less than welcome.**

Palmyra's ample rainfall of 150 inches a year makes it easy to catch your own. Our awning collected as much as two gallons per minute during heavy downpours.

The catchment systems have been pieced together from scrap left by the U.S. military after World War II. During the war, Palmyra served as a refueling station for submarines, ships, and aircraft. As a result, the island is dotted with overgrown bunkers, rusting vehicles, and other relics of the era. It is difficult to imagine that the atoll's rampant vegetation was cleared during the war and that Palmyra was home to 6,000 servicemen.

Most of the atoll's islets are accessible by dinghy or by foot, although some are strictly off-limits, as they have been designated seabird and coconut crab reserves. Each year large colonies of seabirds come to Palmyra to nest, and at times the now overgrown runway is covered by nesting boobies, frigates, and terns.

The island's caretaker, Roger, is a mix of Robinson Crusoe, comedian, and gourmet chef. His enthusiasm for the island is contagious. We went fishing with him and learned that the lagoon's surgeons, jacks, mullet, and milkfish are safe to eat, but certain types of snapper, parrot fish, grouper, and barracuda can be ciguatoxic and should be avoided.

During rainstorms land crabs (not to be confused with the smaller and more plentiful hermit crabs) emerge from their burrows in great numbers. Roger showed us that we need not kill a crab in order to get some of its delicious meat. The best method is to pin down the crab and break off the larger of its two claws; they can function with just one, and will in time



grow another. We also learned, the hard way, that these crabs are strong and quite capable of drawing blood; a stick and gloves are highly recommended when handling them. In addition to fish and crab, we enjoyed grilled lobster and fresh salads, the latter made from either heart of palm or local greens.

Palmyra has a colorful history. The atoll was first sighted in 1798 by an American seafarer, Edmond Fanning, who also discovered Fanning Island, 175 miles to the southeast. Fanning, master of the *Betsy*, was suddenly struck by a premonition of danger one night while sailing home from the Orient. He rushed on deck, ordering the crew to heave to. At daybreak a reef was spotted dead ahead, and from the masthead Fanning spied a low-lying island. Another American ship, the *Palmyra*, found the atoll again in 1802, and its crew were the first to set foot on shore. Nearly 15 years later, a Spanish pirate vessel, the *Esperanza*, was wrecked on the reef. Her cargo of gold and silver, stolen from Inca temples in Peru, still may lay buried on the islands.

Palmyra more recently gained notoriety when a cruising couple from San Diego, Mac and Muff Graham, mysteriously disappeared while visiting the atoll in 1974. The only other people on the atoll at the time, Buck Walker and Jennifer Jenkins, who had sailed to Palmyra on a small, poorly equipped boat, were later convicted of theft after they appeared in Hawaii aboard the Grahams' boat, a fine, well-equipped 38-foot ketch. In 1981, an Australian cruiser visiting Palmyra discovered the skeletal remains of Muff Graham strewn around an aluminum box on the beach at Strawn Island. Buck Walker was convicted of murder, but Jennifer Jenkins convinced a jury she was not involved and was acquitted. The remains of Mac Graham have never been found.

Inspired by these tales of buried treasure and grisly murders, we wandered the island, but turned up no gold or silver or human skeletons. Our time on Palmyra did offer us other rewards, though—a more relaxed outlook, new skills, and new friends. These are the treasures available to any cruiser willing to stop and get to know this “most beautiful island in the Pacific.”

**Mark Smaalders, a yacht designer and boatbuilder, holds a master's degree in geography and has worked and sailed in the Pacific for the past several years aboard his 35-foot sloop, *Nomad*.**



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## Part 2:

# PALMYRA: A Two-Wreck Week

In which Roger attempts to make friends and influence people

BY CARL RELLER

**F**OR ME THIS ADVENTURE began 21 years ago on a small speck of rock called Finn Island near Sitka, Alaska. In July 1977, I dragged the bare hull of an Atkins-designed Ingrid ketch up the beach and set to work. Squandering all my spare time and money, I finished her out with yellow and red cedar, ballasted her with melted-down phone cables, and built her spars from a drifting Sitka spruce log. Meanwhile, I shifted careers—from professor to salmon farmer to bureaucrat to environmental consultant—and stashed every penny I could into my cruising kitty.

I named my boat *Finn*, after her birthplace. In July 1993, at last, I sailed her south down the coast from Alaska. Our first ocean passage was from San Diego out to Hilo, Hawaii. For my partner it was 20 days of *mal de mer* and unrelenting homesickness. She left me as soon as we reached Hilo, and that is how I found my-

self alone and halfway across the Pacific.

Leaving Hilo was the hardest thing I had ever done. Heartbroken, tired, and afraid, I was violently ill for the first three days and lay on the cabin floor numb with nausea, questioning my sanity. I was headed toward an atoll called Palmyra.

The morning of July 7, 1994, dawned clear, revealing Palmyra as a smudge on the horizon. A U.S. Coast Guard C-130 roared overhead, and from the VHF traffic I learned a boat had gone up on the reef during the night. A calm-voiced Coastie established that the crew of the boat was not in danger and that assistance was at hand. The plane roared off abruptly. I reached the island late in the day, negotiated the pass, and anchored in the lagoon just before dark.

The next morning I went ashore and met Roger Lextrait, the caretaker of the island. The boat on the reef was a Beneteau First 35, *Heart of Palm*, skippered by a singlehander, Cliff Merritt.

*Heart of Palm* had been flying downwind under full sail in the middle of the night, her loyal Aries vane on the helm, when suddenly she struck hard. "One minute I was sleeping," explained Cliff later, "and next I was on the floor. Cup-



Roger refused to allow us to try and save *Heart of Palm* when she went aground on the reef (top), but did not interfere when we raised *Sussex Rowan* after she sank in the channel (above).

boards flew open, hammering me with cans of tomato soup. Split my foot wide open. Next thing I knew the boat twirled end for end. I knew I was on a reef." Cliff in a heartbeat went from carefree sailor to despondent castaway. "I didn't know where I was. I set off the EPIRB. Fortunately, in the morning I found I was not far from shore. I made it to the beach, but I had no idea which way to go. A right turn and a 10-minute walk would have brought me to the lagoon. But I turned left, and it took me half a day beating through the bush to find someone."



He found Roger. Soon afterward he met Charlie Smith and Ray Sato, off a boat called *Idiom* that had arrived at Palmyra more than two weeks earlier. In that time Roger, Charlie, and Ray had become friendly. Roger had taken Charlie and Ray hiking and spearfishing and had enjoyed many dinners aboard *Idiom*. Charlie had given Roger five gallons of paint thinner and had agreed to fix Roger's spear gun. But now, with the

abrupt arrival of Cliff and *Heart of Palm*, their friendship was on the rocks.

As Roger led me across the atoll and along the beach to the wreck, he told me that Charlie was a bad man and that I should try to convince Ray, his crew member, to abandon him. Charlie, he said, was pig-headed. Roger said he believed *Heart of Palm* was a total loss, but Charlie had argued that they should try to pull her off the reef, which Roger ex-

plained would be foolish and dangerous. As a result of their disagreement, something had snapped between them. Afterward, Roger said, he had rowed out to *Idiom* to retrieve his spear gun and Charlie had threatened him with a handgun. Roger told Charlie: "You are no longer allowed on Palmyra. If you come ashore, I

## THE FLIP SIDE

Roger Lextrait, a French expatriate, is an employee of the Palmyra Development Company, which holds a 70-year lease on Palmyra. Peter Savio, a Honolulu real-estate developer, is the owner of the company, and categorically denies that Roger ever thwarted efforts to salvage *Heart of Palm* or attempted to take items from the wreck without permission. "We were concerned about this story when it first came to our attention, and we checked it out and found it has no basis in fact," says Savio. "Roger is still the caretaker and is doing a good job. He's the best thing that ever happened to Palmyra. Ninety-five percent of the people who go there have nothing but good things to say about him."

William Bow, an engineer formerly employed by Savio, debriefed Roger in Honolulu after the incident took place and prepared a report for Savio. Savio says he is unable to provide a copy of the report, as it has been placed in storage, but Bow recalls that the dispute in question, according to Roger, was the result of a misunderstanding. "Roger thought Charlie was out to grab some gear for himself, and Roger was trying to protect Cliff from Charlie," says Bow. "Cliff gave something to Roger, and some days later demanded it back. There was a confrontation, and Roger felt he was being threatened. Roger returned the items in question, and then asked everyone to leave."

Bow says he is unable to recall the incident in any more detail. Roger, who is still ensconced on Palmyra, unfortunately could not be reached for comment.

Carl Reller's story, as published here, is based on an affidavit signed by the crews of the sailing vessels *Finn*, *Idiom*, *Heart of Palm*, and *Sussex Rowan*.

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shall consider it a threat and will defend myself. When I do there will not be a piece of you big enough for your mother to identify."

Bloody strong words, I thought, as we waded through the shark-infested water out to the wreck. *Heart of Palm* squatted on the reef in knee-deep water, facing seaward. A small swell broke on the fringing reef less than 100 yards away. The only visible damage was a bent rudder shaft and a few deep scratches. On board were Cliff and Ray. Cliff was not in good shape. In addition to his injured foot, an old back injury had flared up, and with his drooping eyes and limp arms he seemed exhausted. Ray, on the other hand, was young and strong and working hard to salvage gear off *Heart of Palm*, taking direction from Cliff, who sat on the cockpit coaming.

I climbed up the deck, across the cockpit, down the hatch, and sat on the cabin side inspecting the internal damage with Ray and Cliff. Having singlehandedly jacked and winched my own boat up and down 150 yards of beach in Alaska, I had some experience moving heavy objects. I still carried my jacks and winches on board in case they should come in handy. *Heart of Palm* appeared to be half the tonnage of *Finn*. Although difficult, a refloat seemed possible, given the resources. Discussing this with Cliff and Ray, I heard the other side of Roger's story.

Cliff was withdrawn; Ray was eloquent. Ray explained that after the wreck had been discovered the day before, Roger said that he would order Cliff off the island on the first available boat, that Cliff could take with him everything he could carry, but that anything left behind would become Roger's property. "Now I will get my new mainsail, batteries, and a solar panel," Roger had said. Ray said that once he, Roger, Charlie, and Cliff reached the wreck, Charlie immediately set an anchor to windward and began planning how to pull the boat off the reef. Roger insisted that he was in charge and that everyone must obey his orders. To this Charlie replied, "Roger, I ain't here to help you strip everything you want off Cliff's boat. I'm here to help Cliff." Roger and Charlie started shouting at each other, and Roger ordered Charlie off the island.

My head swam with accusations and counteraccusations. It seemed we would not be allowed to try to refloat the boat, so I devoted myself to the mundane task of hauling Cliff's gear and possessions across the island to the old village. Roger

instructed me to place the most valuable items in his shed, rather than in the hut where Cliff had set up housekeeping. Later that evening, a number of the more desirable items went missing, and when Ray and Cliff returned from the wreck they found Roger wearing Cliff's clothes and shoes and feeding Cliff's canned meat to his dogs—all without permission from Cliff.

The next morning, July 9, Cliff said he

had given Ray permission to move as much of his gear as possible onto *Idiom*. Charlie, Cliff, and Ray then planned to sail together to American Samoa. I offered to help. Purposeful activity seemed an excellent tonic in my ongoing recovery from the abysmal launch of my own cruise. Ray and I walked out to the wreck, and with wrench in hand and sharks underfoot we slid and pried *Heart of Palm's* two-cylinder diesel sideways out the

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companionway and onto an inflatable dinghy. While Ray pulled the engine around to where *Idiom* lay in the lagoon, I loaded up my skiff and continued the mule-like hauling of gear across the atoll to Cliff's hut on shore.

Upon seeing Ray and Charlie hoisting the diesel aboard *Idiom*, Roger went into a rage. He challenged Ray: "If you come ashore again, I will consider it a threat and may defend myself against you."

Later, as if to divide and conquer, Roger told me that because I helped carry so many things across the atoll for him, I could stay at Palmyra for free.

Later that day a new boat arrived, *Ho'onanea* from Hawaii, with David, Karin, and Ryan Brown and their crew, Mahesh Cleveland, on board. Roger rowed out to greet them and at once told them Charlie had threatened him with a handgun. By now, however, I felt quite sure there were

no firearms onboard *Idiom*. Meanwhile, David Brown, the skipper of *Ho'onanea*, made it clear that he and his family did not want to get involved in any dispute that might jeopardize their visit to Palmyra. They had visited before, and although they were sympathetic to Cliff's plight, they remained aloof.

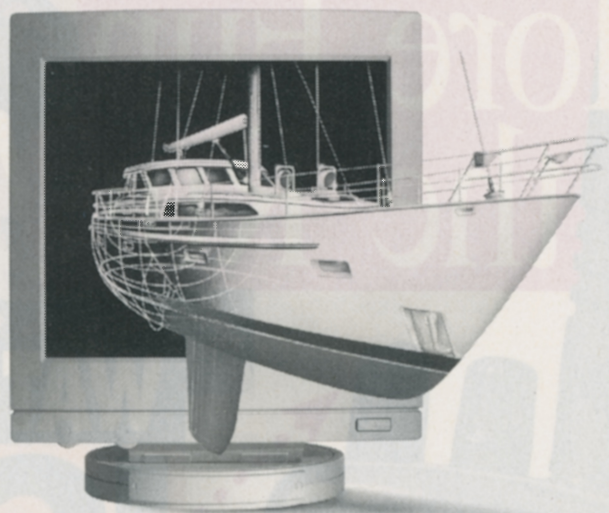
Cliff had been quiet and withdrawn. That night Charlie, Ray, and I asked him if he really wanted our assistance. In light of Roger's behavior, we felt it was important that he tell us clearly what he wanted to do. Cliff reaffirmed that he preferred to sail to American Samoa aboard *Idiom* with as much salvaged gear as she could carry. *Idiom* was well suited to the task, being a 43-foot Garden-designed topsail schooner Charlie had built himself. The four of us would approach Roger the next day and tell him our plans.

Early the next morning, July 10, Ray, from on board *Idiom*, spotted Roger rowing ashore from his boat, *Couscous*, with a rifle. Ray, Charlie, and I dinghied into the beach and met up with Cliff on shore. Now the fat was in the fire. Roger flew into a fit of rage and brandished his assault rifle with its large banana-clip magazine. All hell was breaking loose in this strange place called Paradise.

Accusations flooded back and forth. Finally, in an effort to save face, Roger agreed to let Ray and I continue helping Cliff, but only on the condition that Charlie never, ever set foot on shore again. Roger returned to *Couscous* with his rifle, and Charlie returned to *Idiom*. Ray and I went out to the wreck and set to work removing *Heart of Palm's* mast and rigging. Using a skiff and an inflatable, we ferried the spar across the shallows to *Idiom*. When we were done, Roger announced that *Idiom* must immediately leave Palmyra.

**N**ext morning, disaster struck again. A plea was heard crackling across the VHF. *Ho'onanea* was the first to pick it up: "Does anybody hear us? Could you come out and tow us in? We sank our yacht in the entrance channel and are floating in our lifeboat." David had the fastest tender in the lagoon, so he and Roger set out to rescue our newest castaways.

Several hours later they returned with Nick and Perri Koffman and their "lifer-aft," a hollow aluminum box about three feet square that looked more like a bird-



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K09



bath than anything remotely nautical.

Everyone gathered on the beach to meet the new arrivals. Nick and Perri, recently married, were on their way from Hawaii to New Zealand. Both were tall, lean, and gloriously healthy. Their boat, *Sussex Rowan*, was an old, 22-foot fiberglass sloop from England. While beating up the channel toward the lagoon, Perri recalled, "I couldn't see in the rain squalls and gusts of wind. Nick told me not to worry. We were almost there." As Nick lowered the outboard on *Sussex Rowan's* transom, she hit a coral head in three fathoms of water. In 30 minutes she had sunk to the bottom.

*Sussex Rowan* looked far more difficult to salvage than *Heart of Palm*. *Heart of Palm* was high and dry on the reef, whereas at low tide *Sussex Rowan* was entirely submerged, with only half her mast protruding from the water. Perri was prepared to accept the loss—after all, 22 feet is not much boat to lose—but Nick thought perhaps salvage was possible. Charlie thought so, too, and was ready to launch into action.

At dawn the next day we turned our attention to the new wreck. Perri and Cliff stayed ashore organizing a new castaway chateau, while the rest of us brought our skiffs and dinghies out to the scene of the sinking, and six of us began an endless series of 20-foot free dives to strip the boat of everything that wasn't bolted down.

It was a strange sensation to float in through an open hatch, gather up a load of clothes, books, and tools, and then backpaddle out again through the tangle of rigging. What had seemed almost weightless underwater became heavy and unmanageable as we heaved it from the water into a waiting skiff. Still, within a couple of hours everything was out. Next we tied every fender and float we had to the gunwales. Empty jerry cans, buckets, and pails were inverted and filled by mouth-to-spout resuscitation. Last, we stuffed an inflatable dinghy into the cabin and filled it with air from a scuba tank. Slowly, *Sussex Rowan* lifted herself off the bottom. A few adjustments and a little extra flotation at last brought the cabin top to within six inches of the surface.

With reef sharks circling nearby, we towed the sunken boat up the maze of coral heads and through the channel. With our ragtag fleet of push-me-pull-you tenders and small outboards we barely made one knot of speed, but less than 30 hours after she sank we had *Sussex Rowan* resting in a few feet of water on

the hard concrete apron of an old World War II flying boat ramp. Everyone had worked together. Everyone, that is, but Roger. Throughout all of this, he was nowhere to be seen. That evening, we found that many items salvaged from *Heart of Palm*, which we had stockpiled on the beach, were gone. We found them hidden under various old buildings.

The next day Nick placed an underwater patch on *Sussex Rowan* and we

pumped her out. That afternoon another boat arrived, *Ice Fire*, skippered by Chris Brodie, en route from New Zealand to Hawaii. Chris needed fuel and gratefully siphoned a dozen gallons from *Heart of Palm* and in exchange agreed to transport several hundred pounds of Cliff's gear to Ray's storage locker in Hawaii for safekeeping. We loaded the gear on board, and a few hours later *Ice Fire* headed out to sea.



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best to haul *Sussex Rowan* from the water. Ray found a length of heavy pipe, which Charlie cut into sections with his torch to make some rollers, and I got out my come-along winches from *Finn*. Only four days after her sinking, all hands winched *Sussex Rowan* up onto the hard.

We were ecstatic. After the frustration of not being allowed to do anything to save *Heart of Palm*, it was gratifying to have salvaged *Sussex Rowan*. Immediately following our success, Roger issued a "Continued Violation" notice to Charlie and Ray, stating that they were trespassing on Palmyra and that *Idiom* must leave. By now Charlie, Ray, Cliff, and I had grown tired of these games. We confronted Roger. Cliff accused Roger of taking advantage of him in his weakened condition and charged that Roger had confiscated many of his possessions from *Heart of Palm*.

"Like what?" said Roger defensively.

Cliff listed numerous missing items, which Roger then admitted having aboard *Couscous*. Cliff agreed to let Roger keep several items in exchange for the return of the rest. We told Roger we would leave Palmyra once the missing gear was returned, and afterward Roger returned to *Couscous* and delivered the items to shore. The following day, July 16, Roger stopped by *Finn* and handed me a "Continued Violation" notice identical to that issued *Idiom*. At the bottom, he had scrawled these words: "You will never be welcome on the island of Palmyra again."

By this time almost everything of Cliff's that was salvageable had been loaded onto *Idiom*. It was time to leave.

I found it ironic that while I had dreaded leaving Hilo, I now was relieved to put Palmyra behind me. What happened to us there, I later realized, was a microcosm, albeit an intense one, of dilemmas faced by cruisers every day. Traveling the globe, we learn that right and wrong are relative terms, that even wet tinder will ignite in the flame of confrontation, and that truth, after all, is as fickle as a squall in the doldrums. The next day, in company with *Idiom*, *Finn* headed out to sea. Next stop, Samoa. **CW**

**Having crossed the Pacific, Carl Reller is now living aboard *Finn* in New Zealand, where he is working as an environmental analyst to replenish his cruising kitty.**

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